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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: VP'S MUNICH SPEECH WELL RECEIVED,
SCRUTINIZED

¶1. (SBU) Summary/Comment: Vice President Biden's speech in Munich was very well received in Georgia making front page news in Georgian papers. The Vice President's firm remarks that the United States would never recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia garnered most of the headlines. The meeting with President Saakashvili was also widely reported in the press, although positive Russian reaction to the Vice President's remarks raised some questions as to what exactly transpired in Munich. While no public figure has been critical of the Vice President's remarks, in the zero sum game of Caucasian politics, positive reactions from both the Russian and Georgian side are making some in Georgia wonder if there is more to this story than meets the eye. We expect that Georgian political observers will continue to closely scrutinize US statements looking for any signs of possible shifts in policy. End Summary/Comment.

VP Biden's Remarks Widely Covered - Hailed By Saakashvili,
MFA, MOD

¶2. (SBU) The Vice President's remarks were widely scrutinized by political observers trying to read the "tea leaves" to ascertain if there would be any shift in U.S. policy vis-a-vis Georgia. The Vice President's comment that the United States will never recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia made front page headlines and were highlighted by President Saakashvili in his press conference after his meeting with the Vice President. Saakashvili said that Vice President Biden had assured him of continued political and economic support. Saakashvili was pleased that the Vice President rejected the notion of sphere of influence politics, and reiterated the U.S. position that sovereign states have the right to choose their own course and make their decisions regarding alliances.

¶3. (SBU) Saakashvili, seeking to reassure a curious public, said that he was given assurances that in all negotiations between the U.S. and Russia, Georgia would be a main topic for discussion. Saakashvili also stated that he had received a "firm guarantee" that the U.S. would continue to support Georgia financially. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement saying "(t)hese words of the U.S. Vice President contain a clear message to countries recognizing force as their only foreign policy priority, who defy the universally-recognized norms and principles of international law and are guided by neo-imperialist concepts." Defense Minister Davit Sikharulidze told journalists that the Vice President's speech sent "a clear message to Russia."

Opposition Quiet - Some Skeptics Question Message

¶4. (SBU) As of yet, no opposition figure has commented on the Vice President's remarks. According to Georgian news outlets, Reuters and others "appeared to suggest the new administration of President Barack Obama might be less aggressive in its backing for Georgia's NATO bid." Coupled with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ivanov's comments saying that the "U.S. sent a very strong signal, and the signal was heard. It's obvious the new US administration has a very

strong desire to change and we're ready to cooperate with this administration at all levels", some commentators questioned if different messages were being sent, one to Moscow and another to Tbilisi. In all, the Vice President's remarks on territorial integrity were highly appreciated. Nevertheless, Georgian political observers will continue to follow both U.S. and Russian official statements very closely.

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